

SECRET.

COPY NO. \_\_\_\_\_

C A B I N E T 16(59).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held  
at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on Thursday,  
30th March, 1959, at 11.0 a.m.

PRESENT:-

The Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain,  
M.P., Prime Minister. (In the Chair).

The Right Hon.

Sir John Simon, G.C.S.I., G.C.V.O.,  
O.B.E., K.C., M.P., Chancellor of  
the Exchequer.

The Right Hon.

Lord Maugham,  
Lord Chancellor.

The Right Hon.

Sir Samuel Hoare, Bt., G.C.S.I.,  
G.B.E., C.M.G., M.P., Secretary  
of State for Home Affairs.

The Right Hon.

Viscount Halifax, K.G., G.C.S.I.,  
G.C.I.E., Secretary of State  
for Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon.

Sir John Anderson, G.C.B.,  
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., M.P.,  
Lord Privy Seal.

The Right Hon.

Sir Thomas Inskip, C.B.E.,  
K.C., Secretary of State for  
Dominion Affairs.

The Most Hon.

The Marquess of Zetland, G.C.S.I.,  
G.C.I.E., Secretary of State  
for India and Burma.

Admiral of the Fleet the Right

Hon. Lord Chatfield, G.C.B.,  
O.M., K.O.M.G., O.V.O., Minister  
for Co-ordination of Defence.

The Right Hon.

W.S. Morrison, M.C., K.C.,  
M.P., Chancellor of the Duchy  
of Lancaster.

The Right Hon.

The Earl Stanhope, K.G., D.S.O.,  
M.C., First Lord of the  
Admiralty.

The Right Hon.

L. Hore-Belisha, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon.

Sir Kingsley Wood, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon.

John Colville, M.P., Secretary  
of State for Scotland.

The Right Hon.

Oliver Stanley, M.C., M.P.,  
President of the Board of Trade.

The Right Hon.

The Earl De La Warr, President  
of the Board of Education.

The Right Hon.

Walter Elliot, M.C., M.P.,  
Minister of Health.

The Right Hon.

Ernest Brown, M.C., M.P.,  
Minister of Labour.

The Right Hon.

E.L. Burgin, M.P., Minister  
of Transport.

The Right Hon.

Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, M.P.,  
Minister of Agriculture and  
Fisheries.

Sir Edward E. Bridges, K.C.B., M.C. .... Secretary.

C A B I N E T 16 (39).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held on  
THURSDAY, 30th MARCH, 1939, at 11.0 a.m.

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THE  
INTERNATIONAL  
SITUATION:

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Poland.

Previous  
Reference:  
Cabinet 15 (39)  
Conclusion 2.)

FR. 17(39).

1. THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS apologised for again calling the Cabinet together and at such short notice. His reason for doing so was that information received on the previous day appeared to disclose a possible German intention to execute a coup de main against Poland. Mr. Kennedy had received a message from the American Ambassador at Warsaw to the effect that the Memel episode was generally regarded as reflecting credit on Herr von Ribbentrop, who was anxious to bring off another coup while this country and France were still discussing what action they should take.

The Foreign Secretary said that he had also had an interview with the Berlin Correspondent of the "News Chronicle", who was one of two Correspondents under sentence of expulsion from Germany. He had come over to London especially in order to give information which had reached him from various contacts in Germany to the effect that Poland was the next item on Germany's programme of aggression. This thesis was supported by a good deal of detailed information, including the statement of a local industrialist that he had had orders to accumulate rations opposite Bromberg by the 28th March. It was also stated that the plan was that Germany should occupy considerable parts of Polish territory, leaving only a narrow buttress between Germany and Russia. The Correspondent of the "News Chronicle" also quoted textually the words of a despatch which our Military Attaché at Berlin was sending over, to the effect that he would be glad to see Great Britain at war with Germany in the next three months, for unless this

happened, Germany would have absorbed Poland.

The Foreign Secretary explained that his anxiety was, therefore, lest Herr Hitler should make some immediate move. He hoped that his judgment was not unduly affected by what was necessarily uncertain evidence. If, however, there was a danger that Herr Hitler might act before our major arrangements had been concluded, he thought that we should consider whether we could take some prior action so as to forestall Herr Hitler's next step. The proposal which he wished to put before his colleagues was that we should make a clear declaration of our intention to support Poland if Poland was attacked by Germany. There were two objects in making such a statement. First, the knowledge that we should take such action might cause the plan to be suspended and would thus react to the discredit of Herr Hitler in Army circles; secondly, when our statement became known it would help to educate public opinion in Germany as to the likelihood that Herr Hitler's present course of action would result in Germany becoming engaged in war on two fronts.

Those who were foremost in urging that a declaration on these lines should be made contended that such action would have great effect on military leaders and persons in important positions in Germany. The Foreign Secretary thought, however, that it would be rash to attach undue importance to the prospect of any such result.

The Secretary of State then proceeded to put the objections to this proposal which had occurred to him.

First, that if we were now to make a downright declaration that we should come to Poland's assistance if attacked, we gave Colonel Beck what he

wanted without obtaining any reciprocal undertaking from him. He had tried to meet this in the draft statement which he had prepared, by explaining that the proposed declaration was an interim measure only, designed to meet what was apprehended to be an immediate threat.

The second objection was that there was some risk of upsetting the prospects of direct agreement between Germany and Poland. Negotiations were in progress but we did not know how they were proceeding.

The third objection was that a declaration on these lines would be very provocative to Germany, and somewhat reminiscent of the action taken on the 21st May, 1938. The Foreign Secretary said that he had no particular objection to a provocative statement, provided that it did not land us in an unpleasant situation.

The fourth objection was that the draft statement had the appearance of leaving Roumania out of the picture.

Finally, the draft statement was rather heroic action to take, on the meagre information available to us. It was, however, fair to say that these sources of information had been pretty accurate in the previous autumn, when we had not always been prepared to rely upon them.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs thought that there were two other considerations which would weigh with the Cabinet. The first was that M. Daladier had just made a statement as to negotiations between France and Italy, and it was desirable not to take any action which would upset the possibilities of a reasonable settlement between France and Italy. *Second objection*

The second point was that action had now been taken on the telegrams to Bucharest and Warsaw which had been before the Cabinet on the previous day, and it was undesirable to disturb these negotiations.

The Secretary of State said that his tentative conclusion was as follows. He would like to have a draft statement agreed between ourselves and France, and concerted with the Leaders of the Opposition Parties. The Dominions should also be informed of it. It would then be possible for this draft statement to be published at a moment's notice, if the situation should require it, in consultation with the French Government.

It was necessary to consider to what extent our action in this matter should be dependent upon the views of the Polish Government. His own judgment in this matter was perhaps somewhat influenced by the view which he took of the Polish Foreign Minister. Nevertheless he thought that it would be necessary to inform the Polish Government of our intentions so as to give them a chance of expressing their views. In the meantime an endeavour would be made to secure further information as to the exact position.

The Foreign Secretary asked the Cabinet to consider whether they were prepared to authorise the Prime Minister and himself to issue a statement on the lines proposed, if circumstances should arise which should render this necessary.

In reply to questions, the Foreign Secretary said that he believed that plans had been prepared by Germany for a number of adventures, including an attack on Poland. The real question was which adventure Germany proposed to undertake next and at what date. He did not think that what he was now proposing represented any material departure from the policy which had been approved by the Cabinet on the previous day. Our policy was to resist Germany's attempts at domination. If Poland was the next object of aggression, we must face the situation at once, and the best means of stopping German aggression was almost certainly to make clear that we should resist it by force. Asked by the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he drew a distinction between a seizure of Danzig by Germany, and a German attack on the rest of Poland, the Foreign Secretary said that he thought it was difficult to find any better test than the decision by Poland whether to regard such an attack as a threat to her independence which she must resist by force.

THE LORD CHANCELLOR said that he thought that the indications pointed to a coup in regard to Danzig on the Memel model. He quoted two telegrams dated the 28th March from H.M. Ambassador at Warsaw and our Consul at Danzig indicating that the danger appeared to be limited to Danzig. While he was clearly of opinion that we must support Poland if her independence was threatened, he thought that we should not encourage Poland to go to war with Germany about Danzig. He also suggested that it would be difficult to make a public statement which could not be construed as an attempt by us to

prevent the Germans from trying to absorb Danzig.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that under the proposals approved by the Cabinet on the previous day, we were seeking an agreement between Poland, Roumania, France and ourselves under which, if Germany took action which threatened Polish or Roumanian independence, all the countries concerned would go to the assistance of the country attacked. It was true that this undertaking was subject to certain conditions, but these were not of essential importance. It was also intended that this agreement should be made public and should have a deterrent effect. He thought that the Foreign Secretary's proposals amounted to no more than anticipation of action which it was intended to take in certain events. At the same time, the action now proposed was a serious step and was the actual crossing of the stream. It was right that all his colleagues should consider the matter carefully before they took any irrevocable step.

All that the Foreign Secretary was now proposing was the preparation of a draft statement. He thought that it would now be appropriate to examine the statement and to see whether it met the difficulties referred to by the Lord Chancellor and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was important to secure that the publication of the draft statement would not bring us up against a tremendous decision on some point which did not affect the independence of Poland.

We were, however, faced with a dilemma. If it was true that Herr Hitler and Herr von Ribbentrop



thought that they could bring off a coup in Poland within the next week and face us with a fait accompli before we could decide what action we could take, it was difficult to assess the damage which would result. It had already been pointed out, as a result of the German action against Czechoslovakia, instead of the Czech army being on our side, Czech resources were now available to Germany. It would be a very serious matter if Poland, instead of being a potential ally, also became added to the resources of Germany. If, therefore, we took no action, there was a risk that, in a short time, we should find that Poland had been over-run and that we had missed an opportunity. On the other hand, if we uttered a warning such as was now proposed, we should be committed to intervention if Germany persisted in aggression.

The Prime Minister said that he was somewhat uneasy at the fact that our Ambassador in Warsaw could obtain no information as to the progress of the negotiations between Germany and Poland. One possible, but very distasteful, explanation of this was that Polish negotiators were, in fact, giving way to Germany. He thought it was of the utmost importance to take all possible steps to ascertain what was happening in these negotiations.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS explained that telegrams had been despatched to Sir Howard Kennard urging him to take action from this point of view.

## THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE

said that the position had been examined from the military point of view by the Chiefs of Staff. They had come to the fairly definite conclusion that, if we have to fight Germany, it would be better to do so with Poland as an ally, rather than to allow Poland to be absorbed and dominated by Germany without making any effort to help her. No doubt it would be impossible to prevent Poland from being over-run. The Chiefs of Staff, indeed, thought that Poland would be likely to be over-run by Germany within two or three months. Nevertheless, Germany would suffer heavy casualties in the process, and would have to leave considerable forces in occupation of Poland. There had been no discussion with the French as to whether it was feasible to make an attack in force on the Siegfried Line. In some quarters it was held that this would be impracticable, while in others it was thought that we could effect considerable <sup>by air attack</sup> damage on important centres in Germany. If we and the French were to go to war in support of Poland, Germany might decide to mask Poland and to direct her main attack on the west. Poland had no fortifications, there were no natural <sup>large pools of</sup> features in defence of her territory, and she had German territory on three sides of her. Nevertheless, the Chiefs of Staff thought that if Germany were to attack Poland, the right course would be that we should declare war on Germany. Poland had 50 Divisions

and she had 230 bombers which could be used to bomb Berlin, the defence of which would account for a considerable proportion of the German fighters.

The Minister for Co-ordination of Defence said that the Chiefs of Staff assumed that we should not render ourselves liable to be drawn into war as a result of an act of war committed by Poland, without consultation with us. Further, they assumed that we should only fight for the independence of Poland if the Poles resisted and the French were our allies.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR enquired whether the issue of the proposed statement was to be dependent upon the agreement of the Polish Government.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that he did not contemplate making the statement if the Polish Government were to ask us not to do so, unless he had good reason for thinking that the advice of the Polish Government was suspect.

Asked whether the statement should be made before Colonel Beck's visit, the Foreign Secretary said he thought it was essential that the statement should be ready for immediate use. We should be exposed to great humiliation and should suffer a serious set-back if Germany took any action against Poland before we were prepared. The issue of a statement would also have a deterrent effect.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS pointed out that if we were now to consult the French and Polish Governments, there was a possibility of leakage, to which the FOREIGN SECRETARY replied that he thought it was unnecessary to show the terms of the proposed statement to the French, having regard to the existence of the Franco-Polish Treaty.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA said that the issue of a statement on the lines proposed would definitely commit us to going to war in the circumstances specified therein. He thought that it was difficult to justify the issue of such a statement unless we were asked by Poland whether we were ready to come to her help if attacked. No such request had been made to us.

Attitude  
Italy.

Reference had also been made to the possibility of better feeling between France and Italy. He asked whether any reply had been received to the letter which the Prime Minister had sent to Signor Mussolini.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that no reply had been received, but Count Ciano had sent for Sir Noel Charles and had informed him that Signor Mussolini had received the letter, that he had much appreciated the Prime Minister's action in sending it, that there were certain suggestions which the Duce was turning over in his mind, and that, after consideration of them, he would reply to the letter.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE asked what would be the effect on Italy of a German attack on Poland, since Italy had always regarded Poland as a country with which she was proud to be on good terms.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS thought the indications were that Herr Hitler did not intend to be very much influenced by Signor Mussolini's opinion.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA said that while he agreed that steps should now be taken to draft the statement for issue at any moment, he thought that the Cabinet should consider the matter in the light of all the circumstances before they agreed to the issue of the statement.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS thought that, if the independence of Poland was threatened, it was inconceivable that we should stand aside and see her over-run. He thought that the real point at issue was whether the Polish Government thought it desirable to issue the proposed statement at the present time in advance of any direct German threat. The issue of such a statement would certainly have a deterrent effect and the most important question was the proper time for its issue.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR thought the issue of a statement at the present time might be regarded as provocative, and might force certain elements in Germany to take action which they would not otherwise have taken.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER said that France was bound by treaty to Poland; if therefore Poland was attacked and France honoured her obligations,

Germany would ipso facto be engaged in war on two fronts.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER said that the real difficulty before the Cabinet was to know what was behind Polish policy. The German method was all too familiar. They might threaten to lay Warsaw in ruins in a few days with their air force. It was difficult to know what line Poland would take if faced with a threat of this kind.

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH said that the upshot of the advice of the Chiefs of Staff was that it was better to fight with Poland as an ally than without her. He thought, therefore, we ought to take steps to ensure that Poland did resist German aggression. There were pro-German and pro-French parties in Polish opinion, and we should do our best to strengthen the latter. He thought that there were strong arguments in favour of issuing a draft statement on the lines proposed, and ensuring that it was brought to the notice of those who had to determine Poland's policy.

THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE said that it had been agreed that, if Germany over-ran Roumania, that would constitute a military threat. It might be questioned whether, if Germany over-ran Poland, that would to the same extent constitute a military threat to us, since Germany would then be faced with Russia on her borders. He felt, however, that if Poland were attacked, it was politically impossible for us to stand aside.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS added that if Poland was over-run, there would be no hope of saving Roumania.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs then circulated a draft statement which had been prepared together with draft telegrams to our Ambassadors in Paris, Warsaw and Bucharest. Copies of these documents are not appended to these Minutes, but are kept on record in the Secretary's standard file of Cabinet conclusions.<sup>\*</sup>7

The following comments were made on the draft telegrams.

On the draft telegram to Warsaw THE PRIME MINISTER thought that the Foreign Secretary would wish to ask the Polish Government whether they had any information that Germany was preparing a sudden coup against Poland, and whether they thought that a declaration such as was proposed would be likely to avert it. He suggested that a copy of the proposed declaration might be enclosed, as showing the kind of action which we proposed to take, subject to recommendation, in the light of further information received.

In regard to the draft telegram to Paris, THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER thought that Sir Eric Phipps should be asked to remind the French Government of the existence of the Franco-Polish Treaty and say that if the French Government intended to support Polish resistance to German aggression in accordance with the terms of that Treaty, we should help them.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought that the third paragraph might be re-drafted on the lines of suggesting to the French Government how serious the consequences would be if Germany took action, and we were not prepared to meet it. We had therefore considered what action we could take by publication of a warning to avert

aggression by Germany. With this object in view, a declaration had been drafted, which we sent to the French Government for their prompt consideration. It might be necessary to take a rapid decision as to publication if fresh information came in.

THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE said that, if we accepted a commitment of the kind proposed, the Chiefs of Staff thought that our Staff Conversations with the French should be extended to cover Poland. They thought, however, that such Conversations should be carried out by the French, who had considerable experience of the Poles and had already had Conversations with them. This could probably be done later in a separate telegram.

As regards the Draft Statement it was agreed that the second paragraph would require to be made much more general, and put on a broader foundation.

On the suggestion of THE MINISTER OF LABOUR it was agreed that the words "and inasmuch as some further time may be occupied in the consultations now proceeding" in the third paragraph should be deleted.

There was some discussion on the final paragraph, which, it was suggested, might put us too much in the hands of the Polish Government.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that he came back to the point that the ultimate test was action which the Polish Government regarded as a threat to their independence. THE PRIME MINISTER agreed. The real test was a threat to their independence which the Poles were prepared to resist. Reference was again made in this connection to the question of Danzig. THE PRIME MINISTER said that if the Poles



regarded the Danzig issue as constituting a threat to their independence, and were prepared to resist by force, then we should have to come to their help.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS added, however, that it was clear that Colonel Beck was most anxious to avoid war with Germany if he could possibly do so.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he thought the declaration should end up on a somewhat less defiant note, and should indicate the desirability of settling differences not by threats of force but by discussion. He suggested that we might indicate our readiness to take part in such a discussion, if called upon to do so. Such action would be more in accord with our general policy.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said he agreed generally, but was a little averse from indicating our willingness to enter into discussions between Germany and Poland.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA said that the last paragraph of the Statement met the main point which he had made. He thought it was clear, however, that a statement on the lines proposed could not be made unless the Polish Government so desired.

THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE pointed out that the Draft Statement could not be issued until further information had been obtained. If this happened, the statement might well be issued too late to serve any purpose. He suggested that it might be better to issue a more general statement at an earlier date, which would give more timely warning.

In the course of discussion general agreement was expressed with this view. It was suggested that this might be done by a Parliamentary Question and Answer on Friday.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that to be an effective deterrent the Statement would have to be made publicly.

In the course of further discussion the Foreign Secretary said he attached some importance to taking action which would make it plain to important people in Government circles in Germany that Herr Hitler was embarking on action which was likely to lead to war on two fronts. It was, however, generally felt that the publication at this juncture of a Statement on the lines of the draft circulated to the Meeting was likely to be provocative to the German Government.

THE PRIME MINISTER then read out to the Cabinet an alternative to the Draft Statement which he had prepared.

Some discussion ensued as to whether the Statement should take the line that we had a vital interest in the independence of Poland. The view was expressed that this would not be the best line to take, particularly from the point of view of public opinion in the United States.

It was suggested that the final words of the draft Statement, circulated by the Foreign Secretary, should be incorporated in the Prime Minister's draft, viz; that in the event of action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which Poland felt obliged to resist, His Majesty's Government would lend Poland all the support in their power.

Discussion then took place as to the procedure to be followed.

THE PRIME MINISTER explained that he had already seen the Opposition Leaders and explained the position to them and they had indicated their general concurrence in the line of action proposed. He agreed with the proposal that a Parliamentary statement should be made by means of a Parliamentary Question and Answer, but he thought that it would obviously be necessary to have prior consultations with Warsaw and Paris. It was agreed that arrangements should be made for a Parliamentary Question, which would have to be a Private Notice Question, to be answered on Friday morning, or if that was not possible, on Friday afternoon. In order to secure this, it would be necessary for telegrams to be despatched at once to Warsaw and Paris, and the Foreign Secretary was authorised to proceed accordingly. It was suggested that these telegrams should indicate that a Question had been put down for reply on Friday referring to various rumours which were circulating as to a possible German coup against Poland. It should be indicated that we did not necessarily attach credence to the rumours. If, however, they should, contrary to our opinion, have some substance in fact, and if any action resulted which clearly threatened Polish independence, and the Polish Government felt accordingly obliged to resist, H.M. Government and the French Government would give the Polish Government all the support in their power. The telegram to Poland should state that it was presumed that a statement on these lines would be in accord with the wishes of the Polish Government.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER pointed out that Colonel Beck was coming here on Monday, and this would affect the situation in two ways. In the first place, any statement would add great significance to Colonel Beck's visit, and secondly, he thought it would affect the possibility of getting a definite reply from Poland in the course of the next two or three days.

THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE then read out a Memorandum which he had just received from the Chiefs of Staff, who had discussed the international situation with the Deputy Director of Military Intelligence, War Office. A copy of this Memorandum is on record in the Secretary's standard file of Cabinet Conclusions.<sup>x</sup> The effect of this information was to indicate that the present German military dispositions appeared to be intended to cover a coup d'etat against Danzig.

Reference was made by the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence and the Home Secretary to the importance of avoiding some action on Poland's part, which might result in precipitating hostilities, without consultation with us. It was pointed out that this would apply to any steps for full mobilisation, although it was known that Poland had already mobilised considerable numbers of troops.

tude of  
Dominions.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that he had been rung up that morning by Mr. Lyons who had intimated that if we became involved in a war, Australia would be with us. Mr. Lyons had also indicated that he thought we appeared to be taking on commitments in regard to certain rather weak countries, and he seemed to have no very high opinion of Russia. He had indicated to Mr. Lyons that we might at any time find ourselves faced with a threat of war and that, if such a threat was made, the best plan was probably to meet it at once.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS said that he had received indications which showed that the anti-German feeling in South Africa was increasing considerably.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs said that he had also had a message from Mr. Mackenzie King who drew a distinction between a communication sent to a Dominion Prime Minister for purposes of consultation, in which he was specifically asked for his consent to a line of action, and a communication sent to him for his information, which merely gave him an opportunity of objecting if he so desired. The Secretary of State asked whether, in the present case, telegrams were to be sent in the form of consultation or information, and further whether such telegrams should be sent now or later.

THE PRIME MINISTER thought that the telegrams sent should be 'nformatory. It was desirable to send a fully informative telegram that day. The telegram might set out the position in regard to the International Situation and the steps which had already been taken for consultation between the various Powers. It might be added that, in the meantime, information had been received as to a possible coup over the week-end, and that for this reason we had felt bound to consider what action we should take immediately in order to deter Germany if she was contemplating action at this time. The actual terms of the draft statement should not be communicated that day, but would no doubt be sent later.

The Cabinet agreed -

- (1) To authorise the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to despatch telegrams forthwith to His Majesty's Ambassadors at Warsaw and Paris on the lines indicated in the discussion. These telegrams should state that a Parliamentary Question was being asked in the House of Commons on Friday, suggesting that a German attack on Poland was imminent and asking what action His Majesty's Government would take in such a case. It should be indicated that, subject to the concurrence of the French Government, we proposed to reply that, while we must not be taken as accepting the rumour of a proposed attack as true, we had assured the Polish Government, that if, pending the conclusion of consultations with other Governments, any action was taken which clearly threatened the independence of Poland so that Poland felt bound to resist with her national forces, His Majesty's Government would at once lend them all the support in their power. The telegram to Poland should say that we presumed that this reply would be in accordance with the Polish Government's wishes;
- (2) To authorise the Foreign Policy Committee, at a Meeting to be held at 3.45 p.m. that afternoon, to settle the terms of the statement to be made on Friday in reply to the Parliamentary Question, subject, of course, to the answers received from Paris and Warsaw.
- (3) That telegrams should be despatched the same day to the Dominion Governments for their information, explaining the present position and the action which was contemplated. The terms of the draft statement should not be communicated to the Dominions at this stage.

CONVERSATIONS  
WITH THE FRENCH.

Communication  
technical  
information.

Previous  
reference:  
Cabinet 6 (39)  
Conclusion 7(6))

FR 18(39) 3.

## 2. THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE

referred to the Conclusion reached by the Cabinet at the Meeting referred to in the margin, that the Chiefs of Staff should have authority to impart to the French such information as to our plans and resources (other than certain technical details) as was necessary to ensure co-ordination in peace and efficient co-operation in war.

The Minister said that the matter had been further reviewed by the Committee of Imperial Defence, who had been informed that the Strategical Appreciation Sub-Committee had reached the conclusion that, on balance, we stood to gain more than we should lose by taking the French into our confidence in regard to such secret equipment as R.D.F. and <sup>and gas equipment</sup> asdic. The Committee of Imperial Defence had concurred in this view, subject to no information being given in regard to processes of manufacture. Any secret equipment which the French desired to adopt would have to be manufactured in this country.

The Minister said that he had proposed to submit this matter to the Cabinet later, but as Staff Conversations were now proceeding rather more rapidly than had previously been anticipated, he would be glad if the Cabinet would reach a decision on this matter that morning.

The Cabinet agreed:

That our representatives in the Staff Conversations should have authority to disclose to the French secret equipment, such as R.D.F. and asdic, subject to a stipulation that such of our secret equipment as the French may desire to adopt should be manufactured in this country.

and gas  
equipment

DRAFT STATEMENT

The policy of His Majesty's Government, as of other Governments with whom they have been in consultation, is not directed against any legitimate aims or interests of the German Government, but is concerned solely with the prevention of further attempts by that Government to destroy by force or threat of force the independence of other states.

Apart from other evidence at their disposal that is disquieting, His Majesty's Government have not failed to observe that the German Government have, during the last few days, begun to employ the same methods of violent press attack on Poland, that were used to prepare for the forcible absorption of Czecho-Slovakia.

This is inevitably causing anxiety, and inasmuch as some further time may be occupied in the consultations now proceeding, His Majesty's Government think it desirable forthwith to make plain what is their position pending the conclusion of these consultations.

His Majesty's Government earnestly hope that their anxieties may be without foundation, and, as they have repeatedly stated, it is no part of their policy to interfere with the adjustment through free negotiation between the parties concerned of any differences that may from time to time arise between them.

At the same time in pursuance of the policy to which their present consultations are directed I wish to say on behalf of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, that, in the event.....



2.

event of resort by the German Government to any action which the Polish Government feels obliged to regard as a threat to their independence and accordingly to resist, His Majesty's Government will at once lend the Polish Government all support in their power.

Draft telegram to Sir E. Phipps (Paris).

United States Ambassador here has informed us of message, sent by United States Ambassador in Warsaw, to the effect that Hitler considers Ribbentrop deserves great credit for the Memel coup and that, on the strength of this, Ribbentrop is now pressing for immediate action against Poland, pointing out that Great Britain and France will fail to support Poland and that this failure would have additional advantage that it would serve to alienate American opinion from France and Great Britain.

We have some reason to apprehend that preparations for a coup against Poland are far advanced and that action may be imminent.

It may take some days yet to conclude with Poland an arrangement such as we have in mind for the defence of Poland and Roumania, and we feel it is highly desirable to give a timely warning to the German Government concerning any aggression against Poland. Even if this does not have sufficient deterrent effect to induce Hitler to hold his hand, we feel that it may produce division of opinion in German, particularly army, circles.

We are therefore considering desirability of issuing, as soon as we obtain concurrence of French Government, declaration of which text is given in my immediately following telegram.

Please at once consult French Government and let me know whether ...

2.

whether they agree and would issue similar declaration simultaneously. I would of course give them as long notice as possible before publication of declaration, but it might be a matter of hours only.

Draft telegram to Sir H. Kennard (Warsaw),

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My telegram to Paris No.

French Government have agreed to make similar and simultaneous declaration.

Please therefore immediately inform Polish Government that we shall make this declaration public at  
on

They will understand, from the terms of the declaration itself, that this is an interim measure designed to meet what is apprehended to be an immediate threat. The continuance of the guarantee now given by His Majesty's Government would be dependent on whether comprehensive scheme, as outlined in my telegram No. , can be put into operation.

Draft telegram to Sir R. Hoare (Bucharest).

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My telegram to Paris No.

Please at once explain to Roumanian Government that His Majesty's Government are resolved to continue with the scheme explained in my telegram No.

They have been led to take this interim action regarding Poland alone in view of the information in their possession which seems to point to immediate action against that country.

ANNEX. BReport by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee to  
the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence.MINISTER.

The Chiefs of Staff have just discussed the international situation with D.D.M.I., War Office, and they think it right to inform you at once of the information they have received.

2. The attached map\* shows the German dispositions opposite Poland to-day. The significant feature is the concentration of German troops opposite Silesia (coal and iron districts). In the North there are four to five divisions on either side of the corridor. This is practically normal.

3. The D.D.M.I. interprets the concentration opposite Silesia, not as an intention to invade Poland from the south west, but as forming an effective threat in any negotiations with Poland. There is in fact no evidence that either the Germans or the Italians intend to make any major move but they are employing the same technique as they adopted when they started the Dutch hare running with such success in February by spreading rumours of Italian intentions in the Mediterranean. D.D.M.I. considers that the present dispositions and smoke screen are designed to cover a coup d'etat against Danzig only.

\* *has attached*

4. The D.D.M.I. does not think the Germans have any intention of going beyond Danzig at present, or that the Poles in present circumstances will fight if Danzig is the only issue unless Germany presents an ultimatum in regard to it. They would, however in his judgment, undoubtedly fight for the Corridor.

5. If the Cabinet decide to make an announcement the Chiefs of Staff think that the following points should be safeguarded. It should be made clear that we should not intervene -

- (a) unless there were a definite act of aggression against Polish territory;
- (b) unless the Poles resisted such aggression and appealed to us to help;
- (c) unless France were fully committed with us.

6. The Chiefs of Staff think it important that the Poles should make a simultaneous declaration that they would come to the help of France or ourselves if either of us were attacked. Otherwise there would be no two front war for Germany.

7. The Chiefs of Staff also think it important that we should, by some means, secure that Roumania's resources are denied to Germany in the event of war.

(Signed) C.L.N. NEWALL.

30th March, 1939.